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Fetzer Memorial Trust—A Personal View

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In my first discussion with John Fetzer, during Thanksgiving week of 1988, he focused on a question that became a recurrent theme of our conversations over the next two years, and that was *how to create an organizational vessel that could carry his visionary mission over the next 300 years?* During the previous few years, he had experienced periods of great frustration with two presidents failing to successfully launch that vision. He was frustrated, but not at all discouraged. At age 88, he had a sense of urgency and courageous clarity that reminds me of the Bible verse, “He held to his purpose like a man who could see the invisible,” (Hebrews 11, 27). As he repeated often to close colleagues, “I’ve been born into several lifetimes to create an institution to serve this mission, and each time I have failed, and this is my last chance—I will not return!” Those who witnessed John’s passion could not help but be incorporated into the spiritual energy flowing through him.

He would speak of two fault-lines that gave him particular concern for the Institute’s future:

(1) Failure of Purpose—Being drawn off mission by future leaders who either are not aligned with or simply do not understand the Institute’s vision and purpose.

(2) Failure of Finance—Being unable to sustain sufficient financial resources required over many generations to support the mission.

When we talked about various organizational arrangements, he would refer to the genius of the founders of our country who were able to institutionalize a system of separation of powers, checks and balances that provided for a continuity of commitment, while permitting flexibility to change with the times. The creation of several independent organizations, representing facets of John’s vision, was guided by this respect for the Founding Fathers. Moreover, John’s own understanding of human nature and his genius as business leader were clearly at work in these decisions.

The Fetzer Memorial Trust was created in this context as a way of addressing the above concerns. The Memorial Trust Board was constituted of a few of John’s closest colleagues with whom he had developed his vision. The purpose was not to give the Trust a veto over the Institute’s mission or even a vote, but simply a voice. Including those close to him in the dialogue would help perpetuate the legacy. John would clearly

appreciate (most likely be astonished) with how the Memorial Trust has carried forth this dream in relationship to both the challenges of mission and finance.

Now, nearly twenty years since I first discussed these matters with John, the boards of the Institute and Trust are confronted with the same question that he struggled with at the end of his life: What are the organizational structures that have the best chance of sustaining the founder's vision? And, indeed, he would want us to struggle with this question. John was always looking for the best approach. He was not stuck in the past, but always looking to the future. He was growing to the very end of his life -- the Institute and Trust need, above all, to continue that tradition.

I believe extending the term of the Memorial Trust continues to provide the best, viable approach to "John's question." I also believe that the two boards are on the verge of imagining an even more significant long-term role for the Trust.

Over the years, we've come to understand an underlying, more fundamental challenge to John's vision, and that is the paradox of how the Institute can stay deeply rooted spiritually while focusing on making a difference in a secular culture. John pointed to this when describing the tension between spirituality and materialism in *America's Agony*. We live in an in-between time, when the secular and spiritual are working out a new relationship. Positioning itself in the "fertile crescent," the Institute is a microcosm (imaginal cell) of this emergent paradigm. *How can the Institute retain its balance and stand upright, grounded in its spiritual center, while facing into the huge gravitational pull of a "disenchanted," secular society?* It is especially in relation to this core question that the Memorial Trust may provide an extraordinary service to the Institute's future.

Just as the Memorial Trust has provided a "counter-culture" to allow for the incubation of a bold pioneering science through the Fetzer/Franklin Fund, in the future the Trust could also provide a creative environment for the deep work necessary for exploring the spiritual foundations of the global awakening.

I can imagine the wealth of experience and wisdom embodied in the Institute's trustees being brought into the Memorial Trust as those trustees retire. As one example, these Trustee Emeriti could become a Council of Elders and a mentoring voice to the Institute while at the same time articulating a spiritual vision for the emerging global community. The freedom of spirit required for such creative visioning is difficult to sustain within the Institute alone, which is rightfully related to making a difference in the dominant culture. The Memorial Trust, working closely with the Institute, provides a complementary culture necessary for a larger community of freedom.